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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

Warsaw Pact Forces Opposite NATO

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WARSAW PACT FORCES OPPOSITE NATO

NOTE

This Estimate is concerned with the Warsaw Pact forces—primarily ground and tactical air forces—located in the European USSR and Eastern Europe opposite NATO. Soviet naval, bomber, and missile forces are treated only insofar as they bear directly on potential European land campaigns. Soviet theater forces opposite China are discussed in NIE 11-13-73, *The Sino-Soviet Relationship: The Military Aspects*. Details on Soviet general purpose naval forces are contained in NIE 11-15-74, *Soviet Naval Policy and Programs*. Comprehensive estimates on Soviet strategic attack and defense forces are contained in NIE 11-3/8-74, *Soviet Forces For Intercontinental Conflict Through 1985*. Details of order-of-battle and equipment characteristics which are outside the scope of this Estimate may be found in joint CIA/DIA memorandums and in Defense Intelligence Agency reports and estimates.

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PRINCIPAL JUDGMENTS

The USSR considers its military strength in Europe to be fundamental to the protection of its national interests, to the maintenance of its strategic posture vis-a-vis the West, and to its management of foreign policy. The Soviets appear committed to maintaining a demonstrable numerical edge over NATO in some key elements of theater forces such as divisions, tanks, artillery, and combat aircraft. They cannot, however, separate Europe from the larger context of the overall theater and strategic resources available to the USSR and the West. We believe that the Soviets, given this larger view of the existing balance, consider both NATO and the Warsaw Pact to be deterred from initiating war.

Soviet thinking on the nuclear aspects of a war in Europe has changed in the past decade and may still be changing. The Soviets evidently no longer expect that any NATO use of nuclear weapons would necessarily be answered with massive Pact nuclear strikes throughout NATO Europe. We estimate that the following considerations characterize current Soviet concepts of the initial stages of a war in Europe:

- The Soviets believe that a war in Europe probably would begin with both sides using only non-nuclear weapons.
- They also believe that the Pact would quickly contain a non-nuclear NATO attack, go on the offensive, and achieve early successes in penetrating NATO's defenses.
- The Soviets would continue to use only non-nuclear weapons as long as possible.
- NATO would initiate the use of nuclear weapons to compel Pact forces to halt their offensive.
- If NATO's initial use of theater nuclear weapons were selective and limited, we could not confidently predict the Soviets' response. But they have been broadening the range of options available to them for responding. They might continue purely non-nuclear operations. Or they might launch a massive theater nuclear strike—the response which they practice most frequently in exercises. But we cannot exclude the possibility that they would respond with limited nuclear strikes of their own—they have considered this alternative.

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- The Soviets reckon, however, that once nuclear weapons are introduced by either side, the risk of escalation is very great because the side that struck first massively would have the advantage. The likelihood of an attempted preemption by one side or the other with massive, theater-wide strikes would increase greatly.
- Available classified Soviet writings are vague with regard to the issue of nuclear escalation from the European theater to a US-USSR intercontinental exchange. Unclassified writings characterize such escalation as likely.
- Recent evidence does not reveal Soviet intentions toward carrying a Pact offensive into France. The Soviets might prefer not to involve the French in the conflict because the independent French nuclear capability would increase the risk of nuclear escalation.

Because of the uncertainties in our appreciation of current Soviet nuclear doctrine and our lack of information by which to judge how Soviet political authorities would respond to a proposal by the Soviet military to use nuclear weapons, we cannot confidently predict how the Warsaw Pact would react to a NATO initiation of nuclear war. But we judge that the odds still favor rapid escalation once nuclear war began in Europe.

The Warsaw Pact has some 150 divisions in varying states of strength and combat readiness and some 4,200 tactical aircraft, in Eastern Europe and the portion of the USSR opposite NATO. Another 22 divisions and 250 tactical aircraft in the central USSR probably constitute a general reserve for use against either NATO or China. Elements of the Pact's navies and strategic attack and defense forces would also be used in a European war. The Soviets evidently plan for military operations against NATO in three separate theaters:

- In the northwestern USSR and Scandinavia, to defend Murmansk and Northern Fleet installations, to neutralize or seize NATO installations in northern Norway, and to attack NATO naval forces and merchant shipping in the Norwegian Sea.
- In central and western Europe, to destroy NATO forces in West Germany and the Benelux countries, and, using airborne and amphibious forces against key Danish islands in conjunction with ground attacks through Jutland, to assist the Pact navies in gaining control of the Baltic Sea and assuring passage from the Baltic to the open ocean.
- In southern Europe, against Greece and Turkey to secure the Turkish Straits and support naval operations in the eastern Mediterranean. Also, operations against northern Italy, intended to

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secure the southern flank of Pact forces attacking West Germany, might be launched from Hungary through Yugoslavia or Austria.

The Soviets would expect Central Europe to be the decisive theater of a large-scale NATO-Warsaw Pact conflict. Whether they would launch offensives all along NATO's flanks concurrently with any campaign in Central Europe is uncertain. We believe that the Warsaw Pact has the means to conduct limited, but not general, offensive operations in Scandinavia and southern Europe while simultaneously carrying out an offensive against the NATO center. We judge that early Pact offensives toward the Turkish Straits and northern Norway are more likely than in the other flank areas such as Italy and the rest of Scandinavia.

The Soviets consider it likely that, in the case of a NATO-Pact war, Pact operations—including major offensives—would begin prior to their carrying out a large-scale reinforcement with ground forces from the USSR. Until about the mid-1960s, the Soviets expected to conduct such a reinforcement in advance of war. This change, which has become apparent in Pact writings and exercise scenarios since the late 1960s, may have occurred because the Soviets no longer count on having the time for prior reinforcement, and also because of the danger that such action could be counterproductive. For example, it might cause NATO to begin a buildup of its own that would work against the Pact's initial numerical superiority of forces in Central Europe. The Soviets may also believe that the reinforcement process is not as severely threatened by NATO nuclear attack as it was in earlier years. This change in doctrine does not necessarily represent a change in Soviet preferences but reflects what is, from their point of view, a prudent planning assumption. This appreciation of Pact offensive concepts has important warning implications for NATO. In particular, we no longer can be confident that the movement of a 25-30 division force from the USSR into Central Europe would take place before an attack.¹

The Soviet military evidently believes that Pact ground forces are superior to NATO's. They also believe that Pact theater forces now in Central Europe are not only capable of containing a NATO attack in the early days of a conflict, but are also capable of conducting a non-nuclear offensive into West Germany. This rapidly advancing offensive would depend on the tank—Pact forces in Central Europe have some 16,000. The Soviet ground forces are more dependent upon the tank than any army in history. If the Soviets were ever forced to conclude

¹ The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy, believes that this inadequately states the attack warning implications. He believes that the Soviets actively consider attack plans which do not involve the movement of a 25-30 division force from the USSR to Central Europe before an attack.

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that their tanks were unable to penetrate NATO forces they would have to rethink their strategy and contemplate radical redesign of their forces.²

The Soviets probably consider that NATO's tactical air forces could blunt or perhaps even halt this Pact ground offensive. Because of this, the Pact evidently plans a massive, theater-wide air offensive during the initial, non-nuclear phase of a war, aimed at destroying NATO's tactical air forces and other nuclear systems and facilities. This attack is to be conducted by tactical aircraft and by bombers of Soviet Long Range and possibly Naval Aviation. The all-out nature of this scheme and deficiencies in the capabilities of most Pact aircraft would make it a highly risky operation, its success depending heavily on surprise to insure that NATO's air defenses are not fully prepared and mobile nuclear systems not dispersed.

The quantity of Pact tactical nuclear delivery systems has been increasing in recent years, and this would enable the Soviets to conduct nuclear warfare in Europe at higher intensities before having to use

² The Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, believes that the Soviet military leaders would be far more conservative than the Estimate indicates in their assessment of the balance in Europe and of the ability of Warsaw Pact forces to execute a successful offensive deep into West Germany.

Soviet military writings do describe a sequence of first containing a NATO attack and then launching a smashing counteroffensive deep into Germany.

There are a number of reasons to doubt that Soviet military or political leaders would have confidence in carrying it out with only the forces already in Central Europe.

- The Soviets have been extremely cautious in reckoning their requirements for any military operation, defensive or offensive. This was vividly demonstrated in the last Soviet military operation in Europe—the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968.
- Numerical force ratios which strongly favor the Soviets may not appear nearly so advantageous in Soviet eyes. The Soviet military leaders would be prone to calculate on a worst-case basis and use assumptions different from the West. If the Soviets assumed that West Germany began to mobilize before the Pact, they would see Pact troops being quickly outnumbered.
- The Soviets, moreover, would be inclined to credit the West with advantages in characteristics of equipment. This appears to be the case especially with aircraft, and there are indications of Soviet apprehensions over the air operation which their strategy projects, as this Estimate points out.
- A further example of conservative thinking was suggested in two exercises in which the Soviets appear to have initiated use of nuclear weapons in order to stop NATO attacks.
- Finally, Soviet behavior in MBFR suggests that the Soviets today are far more conservative in calculating their force requirements in Europe than they were ten and 15 years ago.

This view of the Soviet assessment of the chances of success in the operations described in the Estimate suggests that the Soviets would much prefer to reinforce before starting operations in Germany if they could, and that failing such reinforcement they would have substantial doubts over their capability to launch an offensive deep into West Germany. The reason for practicing initiation of operations before reinforcement appears to be a Soviet judgment that there may not in fact be time to bring forces forward before the war starts.

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their USSR-based systems. There is, however, no direct evidence that they are deliberately seeking an alternative to using their USSR-based nuclear forces in large-scale theater nuclear war. Available evidence, although inconclusive, suggests that the Soviets have nuclear weapons in Eastern Europe, but we can only roughly approximate how many nuclear weapons might be stored in the likely storage facilities.

Soviet military doctrine categorizes toxic chemical agents along with nuclear weapons as "weapons of mass destruction" and implies that the Pact would use chemical weapons once nuclear weapons were in use. We have little doubt that the Soviets possess substantial stocks of toxic chemical agents but cannot estimate the size of their stockpile. We have good evidence, however, that some toxic chemical munitions are available to Soviet air forces in Eastern Europe. Pact forces emphasize training and equipment for defense against chemical and radiological effects and we judge they could operate in a CBR environment more effectively than NATO forces.

Since the mid-1960s, the Soviets have carried out a major expansion and renovation of their theater forces:

- In the ground forces, the numbers of tanks and artillery pieces have been substantially increased and a variety of other changes in organization and equipment have brought about larger and more modern divisions. Motor transport capability has been added not only to supply ammunition for the added weapons, but also to improve overall logistic capability. Modern ground-based air defense systems are being assigned to the ground forces in large numbers. Technical improvements, particularly in air defense and artillery weapons, and the improvements to the APCs also contribute to greater theater force capabilities. Despite these improvements, however, ground force units still have a mixture of old and new equipment and some units in the USSR have substantial shortages.
- The Soviet tactical air forces opposite NATO have remained relatively stable in numbers but have begun acquiring a new generation of aircraft and weapons that is enabling them to change their traditional air defense orientation toward a broader range of offensive as well as defensive missions. But the full realization of these possibilities is still some way off. Despite the acquisition of some new aircraft with capabilities similar to the better NATO aircraft, the majority of Soviet and East European tactical aircraft still have short ranges and low payloads and lack the sophisticated weaponry and avionics of US aircraft.

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We have recently acquired a piece of evidence that suggests the Soviets have, or plan to have, nuclear artillery rounds.

In the East European forces, reorganization, expansion, and force modernization has allowed them to assume greater responsibilities in Pact military plans. Although improvements in East European ground forces have generally followed the Soviet lead, they have tended to lag by a few years and to proceed more gradually.

The momentum of the Soviet drive to maintain superiority of theater forces in Europe seems likely to lead to gradual expansion and further technological improvements in Soviet theater forces through the end of the 1970s.* If the trend of the last two years or so continues, the overall size of the Soviet theater forces will increase by about 100,000 men by the early 1980s, when they would then have a total of more than 2.1 million.

* See footnote 2.

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